

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A1

THE WASHINGTON POST
14 February 1982

Reagan Backs Ac for Central Political, Paramilitary Steps

By Don Oberdorfer and Patrick E. Tyler
Washington Post Staff Writers

President Reagan has authorized a broad program of U.S. planning and action in war-torn Central America, including the encouragement of political and paramilitary operations by other governments against the Cuban presence in Nicaragua, informed sources said yesterday.

The administration program, adopted after top-level discussions in the National Security Council, includes a range of economic, political and propaganda elements in addition to promoting action by friendly foreign governments designed to disrupt Cuban-Nicaraguan supply lines of arms to guerrilla forces in El Salvador.

It is not known at this point what action, if any, has been taken by other governments, or what direct support, if any, the United States has provided.

A White House spokesman said last night that he was unable to comment on the reports.

Administration officials have charged that the rebel forces in El Salvador are directed from bases in Nicaragua with the assistance of Cuban advisers, and that training bases and supply facilities in Nicaragua provide a platform for the Salvadoran insurgency.

Since a three-month U.S. effort to reach a negotiated accommodation with the Nicaraguan regime became deadlocked at the end of last October, U.S. officials increasingly have viewed Nicaragua as a menace to U.S. interests on the scale of "another Cuba."

As part of the effort to counteract secret Cuban-Nicaraguan insurgency support activities, which have been publicly denied by Managua, the CIA is reported to have proposed a secret \$19 million plan to build a broad political opposition to the Sandinista rule in Nicaragua, and to create "action teams" for paramilitary, political operations and intelligence gathering in Nicaragua and elsewhere.

One friendly foreign government that might be involved is Argentina, whose ruling military junta long has been opposed to leftist activities in the hemisphere and which is reported by

some sources to be training as many as 1,000 men for this purpose.

As reportedly contemplated by the CIA, non-Americans would be used for the most part in implementation of its plan, but the possible use of American personnel to undertake unilateral paramilitary action against some unspecified "special Cuban targets" also was envisaged.

It could not be learned whether the CIA proposal has been approved and implemented. Reliable sources, however, said that U.S.-backed activities aimed at Nicaragua have been started along the Honduran-Nicaraguan border within the last three months.

These U.S. activities, according to one report, have been limited initially to advising and supporting a force made up largely of anti-Sandinista exiles in Honduras in a position to harass the Nicaraguan regime. The activities are reported to have been stepped up in recent weeks to match increasing military action by guerrillas in nearby El Salvador.

Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Miguel D'Escoto, in an interview with United Press International Feb. 5, charged that the United States was arming an exile army of 6,000 men in 20 training camps along the border in collusion with Honduras, Guatemala and Argentina.

Argentina has denied military involvement in Central America, and last week withdrew its ambassador from Managua. U.S. spokesmen have refused to comment on reports of American support for covert actions in the area, citing a longstanding rule against confirming or denying such activities.

Reagan, who is reported to have approved many of the elements of the overall approach to Central America in mid-November, is spending time this weekend drafting a speech to announce the long-promised Caribbean Basin plan of economic support for friendly nations.

The speech, which is expected to be delivered within 10 days, will be the high-water mark of Reagan's public involvement in the administration's concern about development in the area.

Until now, the president has allowed Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig Jr. and other officials to take a high profile of concern, condemnation and warnings, but Reagan has had much less to say.

The president is unlikely to provide details in the forthcoming speech of the military aspects of the plans to counter Cuban and Nicaraguan influence. It was learned, however, that the Defense Department has been authorized to draw up contingency plans to deal with "unacceptable military action" by Cuba in the future.

One part of the planning is to address the possible use of U.S. forces to deter the possible introduction of Cuban military forces into Central America.

Another aspect is planning for exertion of "direct pressure" against Cuba, in the form of such actions as a naval quarantine to block Cuban domestic petroleum supplies, and retaliatory air actions against Cuban forces and installations.

CONTINUED